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London Municipal Society

The greater London traffic
problem

[London]

[1923]

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LONDON MUNICIPAL SOCIETY AND
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THE GREATER LONDON TRAFFIC PROBLEM.

A SCHEME FOR ITS SOLUTION.

LONDON MUNICIPAL SOCIETY AND NATIONAL UNION OF RATEPAYERS'
ASSOCIATIONS, Palace Chambers, Bridge Street, Westminster, S.W.1.

Price 2d.

LONDON MUNICIPAL SOCIETY AND NATIONAL UNION OF RATEPAYERS' ASSOCIATIONS.

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The London Municipal Society and National Union of Ratepayers' Associations comprises all classes of the community who desire to reform Municipal Government and to combat Socialism in Municipal and National affairs.

ITS GENERAL OBJECTS ARE:

- 1.—To lighten the burden of Local Taxation by promoting economy in Municipal Government.
- 2.—To oppose the advance of Socialism.
- 3.—To promote an impartial and rational administration of all Local Government Acts, and to seek for such amendments of the law as experience shows to be necessary.
- 4.—Generally to bring Municipal and Social questions under public consideration with a view to sound administration and practical reforms.
- 5.—To serve as a central bureau of information upon Municipal matters, not only in London, but throughout the United Kingdom, and by its department of Economic Education to counteract the propaganda of Socialism.

HOW THE SOCIETY IS SUPPORTED.

The Society is supported by voluntary contributions of its members, and welcomes to its ranks all those who approve of its objects.

An annual subscription of One Guinea entitles members to receive the publications of the Society free of charge.

The annual fee for affiliation of Ratepayers' and kindred Associations is One Guinea.

CENTRAL OFFICE:

Palace Chambers, Bridge Street, Westminster, S.W.1.

Telephone—Victoria 6250.

Telegrams—"Municipalis, Vic., London."

Ms F-6620, 1924

The Greater London Traffic Problem.

A Scheme for its Solution.

The importance of the problem of London traffic is indicated by the great public attention given to it in the last 25 years. During that time the Government have appointed a Royal Commission and special committees to inquire into the subject.

The views of the Royal Commission, 1905, and the various committees appointed since that date differ with regard to method and machinery, but are in complete agreement as to the urgency of the question of reorganising London traffic and setting up a new authority.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF ROYAL COMMISSIONS AND OTHER INQUIRING BODIES.

Royal Commission on London Traffic, 1903-5.

Reported in favour of a Traffic Board.

Reported against a municipal body, either elected by local bodies or directly elected.

Select Committee on Motor Traffic, 1913.

Recommended that municipal bodies have powers and a new Traffic Branch of Board of Trade* be set up with similar powers to those recommended by the Royal Commission.

Select Committee on Transport (Metropolitan Areas), 1919.

Expressed the strong conviction that a supreme Traffic Authority was essential to enforce a working scheme between all the different services.

Advisory Committee on London Traffic, 1920.

Recommended the establishment of a small statutory body to operate under the Minister of Transport, and set out the functions of this statutory body. Reported against a municipal traffic authority.

* This Traffic Branch was established and afterwards its duties were transferred to the Ministry of Transport.

REASONS GIVEN BY INQUIRING BODIES FOR NOT SELECTING A MUNICIPAL TRAFFIC AUTHORITY.

Royal Commission, 1903-5.

That the area (700 square miles) had no municipal authority covering it. That a combination of existing authorities was too large, and interests too conflicting to secure the necessary results. That a new elected body (*ad hoc*) would be too revolutionary a change and not acceptable.

Advisory Committee on London Traffic, 1920.

This Committee (Kennedy Jones Committee) consisted mainly of representatives of County Councils, City Corporations and Boroughs in the Greater London area. Rejected a proposal from its Technical Committee that the Traffic Authority should number from 12 to 24 members and should be representative of local government interests alone.

Reasons for rejection were, that the 123 local bodies concerned were so numerous, their personnel so changing, and their interests on occasions so divergent, that there was no possibility of a selection from these sources of a small body such as is required for effective action which would in any way be considered as representative of the whole. Indeed, any authority constituted on these lines would be unwieldy, and the difficulties of obtaining a wide range of vision and of carrying out a continuous policy would be insuperable.

THE L.C.C. ATTITUDE.

The attitude of the London County Council is indicated in resolutions passed by that body at various times.

On July 23rd, 1907, the Council decided that a deputation should wait upon the Prime Minister to urge the necessity of action to secure the immediate establishment of a London traffic board, upon the lines laid down in the report of the Royal Commission, 1903-5.

In 1920, as a result of conferences with the Ministry of Transport and with the representatives of omnibus undertakings, there was a general agreement expressed as to :—

1. The necessity for unified operation of local passenger transport services in Greater London.
2. The desirability of setting up a traffic control authority.

On the 3rd May, 1921, the Council passed a resolution confirming these principles, but suggested that the municipal traffic control authority should be appointed by the local authorities affected.

On May 9th, 1922, the London County Council passed a further resolution directing the attention of the Government to the resolutions of the Council on the subject of London traffic arrangements and expressing the view that : " The organisation of London traffic on satisfactory lines is endangered by the continued delay in adopting measures to give effect to the repeated declarations of Royal Commissions and Select Committees as to the pressing need for reform."

Royal Commission on Greater London Government, 1923.

The views of the Royal Commission on Greater London Government, 1923, with regard to the problems of London traffic are important because the Commission received evidence from witnesses representing a large majority of the Local Authorities in Greater London. All the five County Councils, County Borough Councils, seven of the eight Borough Councils, forty-eight out of the sixty-four Urban District Councils and five of the twelve Rural District Councils in Greater London presented evidence, while all the thirty Local Authorities within the Administrative County of London also placed evidence before the Commission.

Therefore, there was a most authoritative and up-to-date representation of the opinions of the Local Governing bodies in Greater London upon this question.

The Majority Report of the Commission states (para. 118) " with regard to Transport there was general agreement among the witnesses that difficulties existed which called for a remedy ; but they were unanimous in considering that the Central Authority suggested by the London County Council would not be a suitable authority to become the transport authority for the whole of its area.

" Their first reason was that no transport authority could be effective unless it operated over an area considerably larger than the largest area which could be assigned, for the purpose of the administration of other services, to the Central Authority. They were opposed to extending the area of the Central Authority for the sole purpose of enabling it to deal with this service, and they therefore argued that other means must be found for dealing with the existing difficulties (Herts, Q.3051, 3075-6, 3079-84 ; Surrey, M.54, Q.3573-4, 3986-7 ; Essex, M.10,30 ; Croydon, M.15 ; Kent, Q.5149).

" They further said that since the Central Authority would include a large number of representatives of the area which now forms the county of London, it could not be impartial in dealing with traffic questions if it continued to be an operating authority (Herts, Q.3050, 3054-5 ; Surrey, M.54 ; Essex, M.30 ; Croydon, M.15 ; Wimbledon, M.10. (h)). Some witnesses further objected to entrusting this work to an authority which owned, even if it

did not operate, any means of transport (Middlesex, M.236; Wimbledon, Q.8159-63). These views were strongly influenced by the past history of the London County Council tramway system, as well as by the financial results of the operation of other tramway systems in the Greater London area (Essex, Q.4484-7; Middlesex, Q.5743-4; Richmond and Barnes, Q.7827)."

The Majority Report further states that "there was little disagreement with the functions proposed to be assigned to the new Traffic Authority by the Advisory Committee of 1920. (Para. 131.) . . . Alternative constitutions were suggested by some of the Councils of Outer London."

The Majority Report then states (Para. 132) that "on examining the recommendations of the four bodies of inquiry (into London Traffic) to which we have referred, in relation to the numerous and diverse services commonly included under the head of transport, we found certain common elements, viz.: (1) that those services could not be efficiently administered within the limits of the existing organisation of local and central government; (2) that they ought to be placed as far as possible in the hands of a single authority."

It is important to note that the Majority Report states:—"We are of opinion that the proposed Central Authority is not a suitable body for the purpose of transport control." (Para. 252.)

It will be seen, therefore, that, in the opinion of the majority of the Commissioners, whatever may happen in the future as regards the proposed central authority for Greater London, transport control is not one of the functions which such central authority should administer.

THE PRESENT POSITION.

The following notes are mainly taken from a Special Memorandum prepared by a leading Traffic Expert:—

The various bodies which have investigated the control of London Traffic since 1903 are not agreed as to the form which such control should assume. The question may raise some controversy, based on political views of different parties. It is, therefore, desirable to take only such steps as are admittedly necessary to deal with the grave difficulties now existing and which must be solved if London Traffic is not to fall into absolute chaos. Further developments will follow as experience shows to be practicable.

The three kinds of traffic authority generally discussed are—

- (A) A traffic board of salaried experts small in number;
- (B) A composite local authority committee of elected members large in number;
- (C) A Committee of Municipal Representatives.

The first, it is alleged, involves much expense for its establishment and upkeep (probably £100,000 per annum). It will tend to become bureaucratic and must interfere or make work to justify its continuance. Without financial powers it will be helpless to secure development and improvement, and with financial powers it will be uncontrolled and extravagant, not responsible to those whose money it is spending.

The second and the third authority is interested in particular and conflicting directions in connection with traffic and roads, and, it is alleged, cannot properly discharge judicial functions. It is unwieldy in character and must be slow in action. It fails to be truly representative while claiming that character. It is unsuited to the pursuit of a technical subject such as traffic operation.

Certain powers over transport have now been conferred on the Minister of Transport and a public department under Parliamentary control (The Road Board) is already in existence capable of handling these traffic questions. In fact, it has done good work already, though it has no real powers.*

The acute difficulties of this present time relate to roads and road improvements, street congestion, and the regulation and direction of street traffic. All these subjects closely concern the Road Department of the Ministry.

No machinery is in existence which brings the local authorities and other interests affected into direct touch with the Ministry for the purpose of handling the questions which arise or which serves to co-ordinate the discharge of duties affecting traffic and roads now scattered in many hands. The first step would seem, therefore, to be the setting up of such machinery.

In taking this first step it should be clearly understood that it is provisional in character and that with the experience to be obtained from its performance other steps which may tend towards a complete solution will become evident and accepted, whether in one direction or another. It is not intended to prejudice the right solution whatever it may prove to be; it is intended to make a start towards some solution.

The time is not ripe for the establishment of a fully armed executive authority and it is necessary to be content, in the first instance, with an advisory authority.

The following suggestions are, therefore, put forward for consideration:—

- (A) That a section of the Ministry of Transport be organised to deal with traffic.

By this means existing staff and equipment can be made full use of and the additional staff wanted will be slight, so leading to strict economy.

* See Appendix for summary of the work of the Road Board.

(B) That a statutory advisory committee to be called the London Traffic Advisory Committee be set up under the Chairmanship of the Director-General of Roads.

This Committee to follow in general lines the present Roads Advisory Committee established under Section 22 of the Ministry of Transport Act, 1919.

(c) That the Committee consist of not less than 12 or more than 15 members to be nominated by the following bodies, as may be agreed :—

1. The Ministry of Transport.
2. The Home Office.
3. The London County Council.
4. The City Corporation.
5. The Metropolitan Boroughs.
6. The County Councils of Essex, Kent, Herts, Surrey, Middlesex, Bucks.
7. The County Boroughs within the London Traffic Zone.
8. The Underground Group of Companies.
9. The Main Line Railways.
10. Other railways, tramways, or traffic undertakings.
11. Commercial vehicle users, horse and mechanical.
12. Labour employed in transport. (Trade Unions.)

(D) That a Secretary be appointed by the Minister of Transport to take charge of the business of the Committee and to undertake the administration of any duties falling on the Minister of Transport in connection therewith.

(E) That the area to be subject to the review of the Committee be an area comprised within a circle of radius 25 miles from Charing Cross and be called the London Traffic Zone.

(F) That in the administration of all matters affecting traffic within the London Traffic Zone the Minister act by and with the advice of the London Traffic Advisory Committee, but that the Minister be not compelled to accept their advice.

It is suggested that all the regulative powers now scattered over Government Departments, the Local Authorities and Metropolitan and City Police be consolidated and conferred on the Minister of Transport and strengthened as may appear desirable.

It is also suggested that the police continue to be the executive authority for the purpose of enforcing any regulations which may be laid down.

The procedure now adopted for the making of bye-laws should largely govern the making of regulations so that there is ample guarantee that full consideration is given to all aspects of the questions arising.

The principal duties falling to the Advisory Traffic Committee will concern roads and road traffic and should extend to :—

(A) The study of all town planning and housing schemes in their traffic aspects.

(B) The preparation of an authoritative general development plan for roads and surface traffic facilities to which all works undertaken should conform.

(C) The selection and prescription of routes to be followed by all or any forms and classes of traffic, and the scheduling of certain areas as unsuitable for particular forms of traffic.

(D) The conditions and regulations to attach to the licensing of public service vehicles, and to the manner in which they are operated.

This should follow the lines to be laid down for the country at large.

(E) The fixing of building and frontage lines on roads and the provision for the future widening and realignment of roads (saving always the special powers now vested in the London County Council's Superintending Architect).

(F) The application of remedies in respect of all factors impeding street locomotion.

By reason of the fact that the Director-General of Roads now controls the Road Fund out of which grants are made for road maintenance and improvement, there will be available a power of giving effect to many recommendations of the Committee without resort to special financial measures.

Opportunity should be taken of the formation of the Committee to secure advice in other directions affecting or concerning London traffic. For example the duties of the Committee might extend to :—

(A) A preliminary examination of all bills presented to Parliament affecting the traffic of the London Traffic Zone with a view to the reports which the Minister makes to the Committees of Parliament considering these Bills.

Parliamentary sanction will still be wanted in all such matters and the jurisdiction of Parliament is unimpaired.

(B) The preparation of a general scheme for traffic facilities in London, with a view to ensuring that the detail schemes embodied in bills before Parliament from time to time conform thereto.

(c) Scientific research into problems affecting traffic and transport.

It is assumed that the Committee would be consulted with regard to all legislation affecting traffic, the revision, simplification, codification and extension of all bye-laws and regulations now in force concerning traffic and traffic operations, the consideration and approval of all new bye-laws and regulations in this same connection.

It is assumed that the Committee would be consulted with regard to all measures necessary to secure the co-ordination of work upon road repairs and improvements and to ensure an uniform practice throughout the London Traffic Zone.

It is suggested that the Committee be responsible for the equitable apportionment between the various authorities interested in the cost of improvement schemes or projects traversing or affecting several areas in cases where agreement cannot otherwise be reached.

The Committee in giving any decision or advice should give also a reasoned statement with regard thereto, and each year a report should be published giving particulars of the proceedings of the Committee.

By this method of administration a judicial and impartial discharge of traffic control will be obtained without raising undue political controversy.

The scheme outlined above has received the general support of the main body of local authorities in Greater London, of the London Municipal Society and National Union of Ratepayers' Associations and other bodies. Opinions may differ on minor points, but the fact remains that the traffic problems of Greater London MUST be tackled without further delay.

Appendix A.

THE ROAD BOARD.

By the Ministry of Transport Act, 1919, The Roads Department (Board of Trade) was attached to the Ministry for the purpose of dealing with road construction, improvement, maintenance and development.

By the Roads Act, 1920, the Road Fund was established under the control and management of the Minister of Transport. Under that Act, the roads in Great Britain are classified under the following heads :—

Class 1, Class 2, and "other" roads. Grants were made to Highway Authorities during 1921-22 to the extent of 50 per cent. of their approved expenditure on ordinary maintenance and improvement of Class 1 roads, and 25 per cent. of such expenditure on Class 2 roads. Important powers were conferred upon the Minister by the Act in regard to the regulation of the classes of vehicles which should use particular roads (section 7) and the licensing of omnibuses (section 14).

The Minister of Transport is assisted in the discharge of his statutory duties by two advisory bodies. The first is a Roads Committee concerned with Great Britain as a whole, which is appointed under section 22 of the Ministry of Transport Act, 1919, and of which the constitution is prescribed by that section as follows :—

"The Roads Committee shall consist of not less than eleven members, of whom five shall be representative of highway authorities appointed after consultation with such authorities; and five shall be representative of the users of horse and mechanical road traffic, appointed after consultation with the interests concerned; and one shall be a representative of labour appointed after consultation with the interests concerned."

The second is a technical advisory body (originating from a Technical Sub-Committee appointed by the Advisory Committee on London Traffic) concerned with technical questions arising within the Metropolitan Police District, not appointed under statute, and consisting of representatives of the Ministry of Transport, the Commissioner of Police, the London County Council, the London Underground and London General Omnibus Group, and the taxi-cab interests. The Chairman is the Chief Engineer of the Roads Department of the Ministry.

The latter body, with which we are particularly concerned, deals, *inter alia*, with the regulation of traffic in existing streets, obstructions to street traffic, stopping places for tramways queues, and all other problems presented by street traffic and pedestrian traffic, including the exits from and platform accommodation on tube railways. While possessing no statutory powers, it furnishes expert advice to the Minister, and with the goodwill of the interests and Authorities concerned, has found a solution for many of the difficulties submitted.

Good results have also followed from the deliberations of the Roads Committee, which, of course, includes London and the surrounding districts within its purview.

The last Report on the Administration of the Road Fund (1921-22) shows that the receipts from the first of April, 1920, to 31st March, 1922, were 22 millions, while the payments were £15,338,000, loans repaid were £236,000, showing a net outlay of £15,102,000. The Road Funds are supplied by receipts from—

1. Motor Spirit Duties.
2. Carriage Licenses.
3. Exchequer Grants.
4. Motor Tax Account.
5. Interests and profit on Investments and Loans.

The payments include administrative and miscellaneous expenses, costs of collection of motor taxation; payments under grants and under loans.

The Balance Sheet on 31st March, 1922, shows a balance to the credit of the Road Fund amounting to over 16 millions, of which £15,814,000 was represented by investments (at cost) in Government securities, chiefly three-monthly Treasury Bills. As against this balance, certain heavy commitments have been entered into which fall upon the Fund within the next few years. To meet these commitments sums have been provisionally set aside amounting to £11,223,000. This leaves a balance of assets over liabilities, existing on 31st March, 1922, of about £4,790,000.

Various departmental Committees are at work on:—

1. Taxing and regulation of Road Vehicles.
2. Roads and Vehicles.
3. Advisory Committee on London Traffic.

This last Committee has ceased to meet as a whole. One of its Sub-Committees continues to investigate a variety of questions connected with the working of the London traffic and deals with stopping places, etc. The recommendations of the Sub-Committee are almost invariably adopted by the various operating agencies, Local Authorities, etc.

An important section of the work of the Road Board is connected with Arterial Roads in the area of Greater London.

Eight of these important Arterial Road Schemes have been considerably advanced. During the autumn and winter of 1921-22 six further schemes were put in hand. Two other schemes, the Chertsey Road and Croydon By-Pass schemes, are in hand. Arterial road schemes have been put in hand for the relief of unemployment in other areas in Great Britain.

Administrative action has been taken by the Minister of Transport under various Acts of Parliament—Amendment of the Heavy Motor Car Order, 1904; Speed Limits and other Restrictions of User; Omnibus Mileage Charges; Applications to the Minister of Transport under Sec. 14 (3) of the Roads Acts, 1920, in connection with refusals to grant licenses to ply for hire with omnibuses.

**END OF
TITLE**